

## A Chinese Glossary

*The Joy Luck Club* can be read as a primer on Chinese culture. The narrative is full of references to ghosts, *feng shui*, dumplings, tea, and luck. The very idea of the Joy Luck Club melds Chinese and American ideas—the characters are ruled by luck, but they may also invent their own luck.

**Confucius:** a Chinese philosopher of the 6th century B.C. His teachings, broadly known as Confucianism, emphasized ancestor worship, respect for elders and husbands, loyalty, harmony, and order. Though barely mentioned in *The Joy Luck Club*, his precepts color the traditional beliefs often reflected in the behavior of Tan's characters.

**Feng shui** (pronounced *fung shway*): the Chinese art of unblocking energy flow in a room or a house by careful arrangement of its contents. Placement of buildings is also considered important. Ying-ying St. Clair tells her daughter Lena that a plumbing store opening next to a bank portends ill, and the bank manager is later arrested for embezzlement. Lena herself becomes a designer, but her mother finds her deficient at basic concepts of *feng shui*.

**Mah jong:** a traditional Chinese game of skill and luck that features four corners, one for each direction of the wind. Using 144 painted tiles with such pictograms as dragons and flowers, the object is to build as many suites as possible in groups of three. Mah jong remains popular—the most recent incarnation is mah jong solitaire software.

**Mandarin:** collectively, a set of related dialects spoken in northern and southwestern China. Standard Mandarin is the official language of the People's Republic of China and has close to a billion speakers. Other major Chinese languages include Cantonese and Wu.

**Yin/yang:** a duality from ancient Chinese philosophy that divides the universe into two opposing forces. The female principle, yin, is associated with darkness and passivity, represented by moon, winter, and earth. The male, yang, is luminous and active, and symbolized by sun, summer, and heaven.